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The Lab Report, volume 04, issue 01

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Playwright's Lab
at Hollins University

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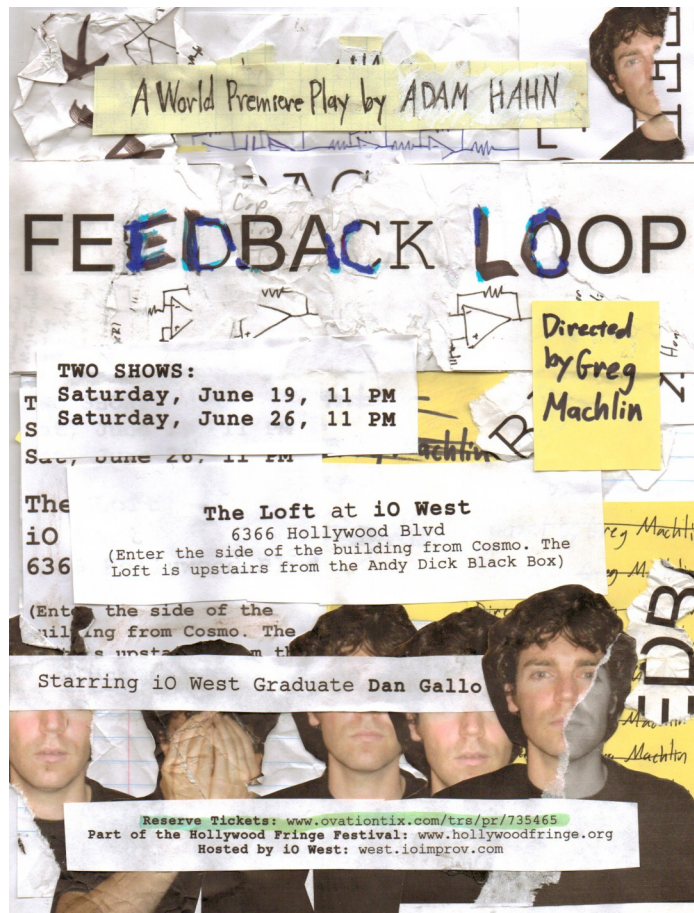


The Lab Report

Playwriting News from the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

Volume 04, Issue 01 (June, 2010)

Feedback Loop by Adam Hahn



Alex is a brilliant physicist who left academia in a desperate attempt to reverse his girlfriend's suicide by building a time machine. He has been trying and failing to save her for the past ten years. This might be the last attempt.

Feedback Loop is a full-length monologue about love, failure, depression, science, and bad science fiction movies written by MFA playwright Adam Hahn last year for Lab, and given a reading in the 2009 Festival of Student Readings at Studio Roanoke.

The play was produced in June of this year as part of the inaugural Hollywood Fringe Festival and directed by Greg Machlin. Greg is a talented director and actor who is

himself a graduate of the Iowa Playwright's Workshop.

"I've known Greg for years. We collaborated at No Shame and on short radio pieces in Iowa City, and I've acted in productions and readings of his work," Adam said of his collaborator. "I knew Greg had the right sensibility for this script. He's enough of a geek to enjoy pulling apart the science fiction logic and references to bad movies, but he's also someone who didn't let that distract him from the emotional arc of the play."

Hahn also had praise for Dan Gallo, the actor who performed the hour-long monologue.

"Dan is a committed, generous performer, unafraid to be

vulnerable on stage. We needed someone honest, smart, and intense. Dan was perfect."

The Playwright's Lab partnered with Studio Roanoke to fly in the entire production to be performed on their stage in July. It was very inspiring to see a play read in last year's student festival now fully produced and gaining a wider audience.

Patrick Kennerly, a Roanoke actor and director who performed in the 2009 reading of *Feedback Loop*, saw the Studio Roanoke presentation. He said, "Adam Hahn has an incredible gift for painting pictures with words and drawing us into his worlds with believable, even lovable, characters. Without manipulating, his stories and his people make you laugh, cry, think. When all is done and we have reached the finish, we want to gather up Hahn's characters in our arms, hug them, buy them a drink and tell them that it's going to be alright."



LA actor Dan Gallo

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No Shame Returns to Mill Mountain Theatre



No Shame Theatre is the anything goes performance venue started by Todd Ristau, Jeff Goode and Stan Ruth in 1986. Originally it was a group of actors and writers standing in the bed of Todd's pickup truck on Friday nights at 11PM to perform short pieces for whoever happened to be in the University of Iowa's theatre department's parking lot.



Since those humble beginnings, No Shame has spread like theatrical kudzu, sprouting up in Iowa City, New York, Chicago, Austin, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Portland, Eugene, Asheville, Las Vegas, Miami and many other cities including Roanoke.

All No Shames, no matter where they are, share the same philosophy of fostering an artistic community based on cooperation



rather than competition and providing a place where people can risk failure without fear of personal or professional catastrophe.

"Sometimes, failure teaches the best lessons, and people need a place where they can try things out without fear of failure being the single biggest obstacle to attempting success," Ristau said of his creation.



In 2003 Mill Mountain Theatre hired Todd Ristau to create a No Shame for them as the cornerstone of Underground Roanoke, their late-night series of alternative programming. The venue has remained very popular, despite changing locations several times. When MMT closed in 2008, No Shame moved on campus at Hollins University's black box theatre for a few months before relocating to the newly opened Studio Roanoke. When Ristau stepped down as Artistic Director this past May, a partnership between the playwriting program and MMT returned No Shame to their stage. Proceeds are split evenly with the Playwright's Lab share going into the New Works Initiative—a fund for producing student work off campus.

No Shame has only three rules. Pieces must be original, be less than five minutes long, and not break anything (including the law). Within those guidelines, anyone can experiment with any aspect of writing and performing that interests them. On any



www.noshame.org

given night you might see a 5-minute drama, stand-up comic, belly dancer, ballet, juggler, mime, poet, flower arranger, puppets, guitar player—Anything can happen...and usually does!



"At No Shame there is no one who approves your script, we just take the first 15 pieces that walk in the door. You decide if what you have is good enough to perform, and then we let you know if you were right about that by how loud we clap and giving you feedback after the show at the bar," Ristau explained. "It's really about finding a balance between complete freedom of speech and taking personal responsibility for your own work. Learning how it affects an audience. We're helping people discover how to make those choices."

Because of No Shame, Hollins playwrights have weekly opportunities to mount micro

productions of their work in front of real audiences, using real actors on a real stage. Each summer the students enthusiastically participate in this quirky venue where writers, performers, and audience members are constantly changing roles throughout the evening.

"No Shame changed my life. It has fueled my desire to write and taught me how to be a better writer for actors," said MFA playwright Chad Runyon. "More than anything else, No Shame consistently reminds me how exciting and fun theatre can be."



Jeff Goode, published playwright and guest faculty this summer, put it simply, "Everything I know about playwriting I learned at No Shame."

New Submission Opportunities at Studio Roanoke

Kenley Smith, founder of Studio Roanoke and the first student to graduate from the Playwright's Lab, created Studio Roanoke specifically to provide reading and production opportunities whenever possible for his fellow students in the MFA playwriting program at Hollins.



While we continue to work closely with theatres around the country to get our student's plays produced, it should come as no surprise that the theatre we work most closely with is right here in our own community.

Since opening their doors in 2008, Studio Roanoke has produced no less than eight fully mounted productions of plays from our program as well as several more by our faculty and guest artists. This scrappy little theatre has also hosted more than 30 readings of plays by Playwright's Lab students as part of their Lunchbox Reading Series and hosting Exposed! (Our annual Festival of Student

Readings.)

Studio Roanoke has continued to grow and create even more opportunities for emerging voices in the theatre.

Playwright Don LaPlant, former theatre professor at Emory & Henry, takes over the theatre's literary office this month, and will serve as Artistic Associate.

Ben R. Williams, another of our MFA playwrights at Hollins, has been asked to curate an innovative new reading series called for Studio Roanoke called Guerrilla Playhouse—a monthly event where a featured writer is given a public reading of their freshest and most daring work. Each Playhouse

reading will also be followed by a local musical act in an effort to break down barriers between different art forms. The idea is to build a broader audience for both new music and new plays by welcoming everyone into an almost Café Cino-like atmosphere.

The folks at Studio Roanoke have an open submission policy, and we encourage you send them your work.

It isn't likely you will find a group more dedicated to helping complete unknowns get practical experience and exposure.

www.studioroanoke.org

Devil Sedan by Kenley Smith



The Famous Bobby Pence Trilogy is the Kenley Smith's thesis, completing his graduate work in our program. *Devil Sedan* is the first of the three plays—all of which will be fully produced at Studio Roanoke.

When you own the building, founded the company, and sit on the Board of Directors...some of the obstacles to production are removed for a playwright. Don't think this production is a vanity project, however. The play has been winning awards, getting readings, and being produced

far outside Roanoke.

Devil Sedan took top honors at Barter Theatre's 2008 Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights, was featured at the 2008 Great Plains Theatre Festival, and won the 2009 Joe McCabe Memorial Playwriting Award (sponsored by WV Writers, Inc.).

Baby D, the same Omaha company which read the play at the Great Plains Theatre Festival, produced *Devil Sedan* in 2009 under the

direction of Lorie Obradovich. Lorie is the Artistic Director of Baby D, and is well respected for her work as a director and designer.

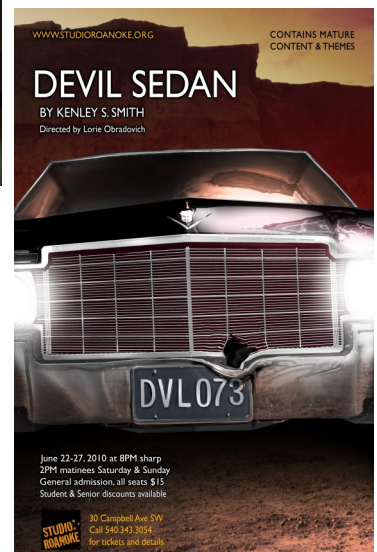
Ken attended the Nebraska company's production and was eager to find a way to bring Lorie back to Roanoke to work her magic on his own theatre's stage.



Reviewer Dan Smith called the Studio Roanoke production "superb" and "a powerful statement about our culture and our humanity."

Dan went on to comment, "Kenley is engaging in the fine southern tradition of storytelling here and he is writing about what he knows.

These obnoxious faux Christians who hate far more than they love, who confuse and traumatize their children with their messages, who castigate people for sins of the flesh that they so enthusiastically engage in are easy targets, but Kenley is far gentler in his humor than some of us might have been. Religion based on hate and intolerance is not as rare as it should be and ridicule is the best way to deal with it."



Playwright's Lab at Hollins University

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From the Director: Welcome to the new playwrights!

When we first started advertising our new program back in February of 2007, we had no idea if we would even get a handful of students when classes started just five months later.

Something about the unique nature of what we're doing at Hollins must have caught on quickly, though, because our numbers have been steadily increasing with each year. It is hard to believe we already have one graduate and several more of our students beginning their thesis work this summer!

Kevin Ferguson, Wendy-Marie Foerster, Anna Gardner, Anne G'Fellers Mason, Yulia Gray, Elizabeth Heffron, and Chad Runyon are all new arrivals this summer.

Welcome! You're joining a good bunch of very talented writers who you will find to be as committed to your success as they are to their own.

One of the things that sets us apart from traditional programs is our philosophy of peer mentoring. Don't hesitate to ask for directions or advice from any of our returning students. You're not alone in your creative world any more. You're a Hollins playwright.

We strive to create an atmosphere here that is more like a conference or retreat than a rigid academic hierarchy. Theatre is a collaborative art form and to be good at collaborating means wanting to help each other succeed.

I think you'll like Hollins, and I'm confident you'll come to love Roanoke as much as I do. It is a weird and wonderful city with lots of interesting people and things to write about. It has several theatres doing new work and lots of restaurants to enjoy talking about plays over very good food at fair prices.

We don't call it intensive for nothing, though. Six months of work gets crammed into these six weeks, and time management is going to be an important skill to develop. But, as any of our returning students will tell you—it is also going to be an exhilarating rush you'll never forget. So—Jump in, take part, and hold on tight!



Todd Ristau, Director